



Erin Beezley – Catholic Charities of Tennessee

As I finished my college career, I was unsure of what I wanted to do next. I knew that I wanted to serve in a position that allowed me to feel fulfilled by helping others. AmeriCorps gave me the opportunity to do both. During my time in school, I was able to travel abroad to many different countries and gained a passion for learning about cultures different from my own. When I discovered an AmeriCorps position that would allow me to serve with refugees, I knew it would be a great fit. I applied for the position and am now an Employment Specialist at Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc. I help newly arrived refugees find employment in the Nashville area, assist them in setting up transportation to and from work, and assist them with childcare and any other needs that arise. The goal is to provide our clients with the tools needed to become self-sufficient and integrate into our Nashville community.

Through my service at Catholic Charities, I have been able to grow both personally and professionally. The population I serve has specific needs that require me to think outside of the box. Every day I am faced with a new challenge and must utilize my problem solving skills to find a solution. I am faced with language barriers that force me to find alternative ways of communicating as well as an opportunity to learn new languages. My goal by the end of the term is to be able to say hello to clients in their native language. I have learned the importance of working with others and collaborating as a team to find solutions and get things done.

As an Employment Specialist, I am able to serve with a variety of people with different backgrounds and skill sets. Some clients come to the United States never having worked before, while others were doctors or lawyers in their home countries. Recently, I assisted a client who worked as a pathologist in India. Unfortunately, his degree was not recognized in the United States and he was unable to continue in his field. I spent many hours with him trying to find a job that allowed him a chance to grow and someday get back to working in the medical field. It was not an easy task, but after much searching, I was able to find a training course that would allow him to become a certified nursing assistant. He enrolled in the course and will hopefully be able to work in a hospital when he is finished. It can be very difficult to see clients forced to work in factories or hotels when they were once lawyers or doctors, but their determination to get back to their chosen field is inspiring.

After my year of service, I hope to return to school to obtain a Master's in International Business and continue working with refugees or other international populations. Spending time with people from all over the world has sparked my passion for learning about and experiencing different cultures. I would love to continue working for a non-profit



organization that deals with international affairs, and would even like to work abroad for a few years. I have learned so much during my time as an AmeriCorps member and look forward to all the opportunities ahead.

Anna Notestine – Catholic Charities of Tennessee

Upon graduating college, I was plagued by the same question that many other recent graduates face: what comes next? In college, I double-majored in Anthropology and Spanish. While I did not leave college with a specific job title in mind, I knew that I wanted to use my education to help others. “If I could utilize my Spanish language skills,” I thought, “that would be even better.” Non-profit work seemed to be the best fit.

Among the many post-graduate opportunities I had explored before graduating, serving with AmeriCorps was particularly intriguing for me. My senior year of college, I was fortunate enough to take a class that would help shape not only the way I looked at the world, but would also steer me towards my career path. This class, entitled “Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Human Rights,” instilled in me a desire to improve the lives, if only in some small way, of those seeking refuge in the United States. So, when I came across a position that read “Cultural Orientation AmeriCorps Member,” serving in partnership with Catholic Charities of Tennessee Refugee and Immigration Services, I knew it would be the perfect fit for me. I feel incredibly lucky to have been offered this opportunity because I know that, unlike many recent graduates, “what comes next” is not always such a perfect fit.

In addition to the joy I feel serving with Catholic Charities every day, I have also gained a great deal of knowledge and improved many skills, including public speaking, interpersonal communication, and adaptability. I am also fortunate enough to work in an environment where I get to utilize my Spanish language skills almost every day.

One of my favorite aspects of working with Catholic Charities is the relationships that I form with our clients. As part of our Cultural Orientation session, we practice English vocabulary words relating to each topic. I also send a binder full of vocabulary words, activities, and important resources that clients can look through at home, in hopes that they will practice. At the end of one of the sessions, I was talking with a Somali woman and her mother. The woman knew some English words; her mother knew none. However, throughout the entire session, the mother had dutifully repeated after me in an attempt to learn English. I wanted to make sure she understood how much I appreciated that she was trying and that her English had improved just by practicing a few words. I asked her and her daughter if they wouldn’t mind teaching me a few words in Somali so that the next time I saw them, I could speak in



Somali and they could speak in English. Sure enough, the next time I saw them we had an entire multi-lingual conversation. We may have only said, “Hello, how are you?” and talked about our shoes, but it was something I will always remember.

This AmeriCorps experience has been truly incredible for me and has shaped my plans for future education and beyond. In the future, I would like to attend law school and pursue a career in Human Rights law. I would like to continue working with Refugees and building strong relationships so that I may improve the lives of those seeking refuge, if only in some small way.